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T.W.

# Theatre World

(Incorporating PLAY PICTORIAL and THE AMATEUR STAGE)

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Edited by Frances Stephens

## May 1950

**H**IGHLIGHT of April was, of course, the Royal Visit on the 20th to Stratford-upon-Avon, where the King, the Queen and Princess Margaret saw a performance of *Henry VIII*, on the occasion of their first visit to Shakespeare's birthplace.

Another brilliant event of the month was the first night at Covent Garden of Balanchine's most outstanding work, *Ballet Imperial*, which has called forth unusual acclamation from all sides.

The Bath Festival will take place from 7th May until the 20th, and *If This Be Error*, a new play by Rachel Grieve, will be presented by Tennent Productions Ltd., with Mary Ellis as the star. On 3rd May T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* opens at the New with a distinguished cast headed by Rex Harrison, Margaret Leighton, Ian Hunter and Alison Leggatt. Meantime, the Old Vic Theatre Company, whose season ended at the New on 27th April, are touring the provinces for four weeks before their visit to Zurich from 30th May to 4th June, which will be followed by their production of *Hamlet* at Elsinore from 6th to 14th June, after which they will fly to Holland for the Festival there, their tour ending on 1st July.

At the Westminster on 17th May, Valerie White, Andre Morell and Lilly Kann will be seen in *Background*. Warren Chetham Strode's new play, and in mid-May, at a theatre not yet stated, Freda Jackson and Mervyn Johns will star in *Deadlock*, by Leslie Sands, a young author new to London. Another new ballet comes into the Sadler's Wells ballet season at the Opera House, on 5th May. This is *Ballabile*, a new ballet by Roland Petit, and the first

## Over the Footlights

night will be a Gala Performance in aid of the Sadler's Wells Ballet Benevolent Fund.

\* \* \*  
We should record once again the traditional performance which has taken place for 25 years at the season of Shakespeare's birthday in the courtyard of the George Inn, Southwark. This year on 22nd and 29th April, the Morley College Actors presented *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, by Shakespeare's fellow dramatist, Christopher Marlowe.

\* \* \*  
Another annual event that earns the greatest support are the productions of plays from Dorothy Sayers' *The Man Born to be King*, at St. John's Presbyterian Church, Kensington. In this, the fifth year in which scenes from the plays have been presented in this church, *The King Comes to His Own* will be performed on 2nd, 4th and 5th May, with a cast almost entirely professional.

\* \* \*  
The newly-formed Russian Arts Society will be launched on 18th May at the Hungaria Restaurant, where a brilliant "Night in Old Russia" will be staged (similar to the still-remembered "Night in Old Vienna" which Miss Elizabette Corathiel organised at Grosvenor House in 1923). Miss Corathiel (author of the delightful book *Oberammergau and its Passion Play*, just published at 10/6 net), is organising this event, and in mid-September there is to be a short season of Russian drama at the Fortune Theatre, presented by the famous Prague Group from the Moscow Arts Theatre, who escaped from Russia after the Revolution.

F.S.

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# New Shows of the Month

"Home at Seven"—Wyndham's, 7th Mar.  
(see pp. 21-26).

"Mr. Gillie"—Garrick, 9th Mar.

"Craven House"—Bedford, 13th Mar.

"Court Of No Appeal"—Chepstow, 14th Mar.

"The Lady Purrs"—Embassy, 15th Mar.

"Latin Quarter 1950"—Casino, 20th Mar.

"Murderer's Child"—New Lindsey, 20th Mar.

"The Provoked Wife"—Arts, 22nd Mar.

"Detective Story"—Princes, 25th Mar.

"East Lynne"—Bedford, 28th Mar.

"Fireweed"—"Q," 28th Mar.

## "Mr. Gillie"

JAMES Bridie has departed somewhat from his more sardonic brand of wit to give us a comparatively simple story of the life—and failures—of an unknown Scottish village schoolmaster, who, however, after his untimely demise, is adjudged among the great ones by the celestial courts!

There is no villainy in this likeable dominie for all he is irascible and incurably allergic to Authority. Alastair Sim, so expert at oily villains, has rung the changes with commendable skill, and we are in full sympathy with his efforts to instil in his pupils the right sense of values. Unhappily, his charges have a way of not making good, but no one could blame Mr. Gillie for that.

Megs Jenkins proves herself once again an actress of rare insight as Mrs. Gillie, the lovable wife of the schoolmaster, and George Cole and Janet Brown are particularly convincing in the first act as the miner's son, Tom, and the doctor's daughter, Nelly, but their later transformation into a "spiv" and over-elegant young lady is a trifle too rapid for conviction.

Gordon McLeod as the hard drinking doctor and Ronald Adam as the minister who has to be the bearer of much bad news from the local school authority, have always the realistic touch. H. G. Stoker and Douglas Muir appear as the celestial judge and advocate. Alastair Sim's production is faultless.

L.J.

## "Craven House"

THE performance of Diana Hamilton's comedy adapted from Patrick Hamilton's novel, provided the pleasure of a visit to old friends. These boarding-house characters are among the few things left unchanged

in this modern age. They have a mild temporary fascination for a patient and idle observer, like odd fish in a transparent pool, but their movements have little discoverable significance.

The wall is taken off "Craven House" and we are lucky to find Miss Jean Cadell in charge of a small flock of P.G.s and a maid-of-all-work, because Miss Cadell can produce at will the choicest and most seemingly fragile flowers of exiguous boarding-house gentility. It is also pleasant to watch Miss Esme Beringer perform feats of antique archery by nod and look and hint. Miss Pat Nye sending a steam-roller over the squeals of little Miss Tilsa Page affords amusement less innocent, but Miss Page gets the best of her awful mother and has sentimental passages with Mr. Richard Longman, nobly undertaken by both but still an unsuccessful imitation of a similar couple in *Quiet Weekend*. Miss Helena Pickard has to look the little frump and Mr. Lionel Newbold her male counterpart with a secret life. It is 1913, which now seems sufficient excuse for any play. They are all amusing in a mild way, but, although mutton is flung about, it all amounts to nothing.

H.G.M.

## "Court of No Appeal"

THIS drama by John Pontifex seemed to have been written with serious purpose to show how uncomfortable it is to have been acquitted of murder or to live with anyone who has been acquitted of murder. Actually, few people who have stumbled into unfortunate notoriety return to the scene of their former life and this play proves their wisdom.

The first act was promising, especially scene two in which the police arrive, but a long interval damped down the excitement. The second act represented a much later chapter, with arrest, trial and acquittal all in the past. To add to this disappointment, it was discursive, prosy and repetitive, and again a long interval did its deadly work. The third act just fell away.

Heading a company remarkable for sincerity and naturalness, Ewen Solon, as a doctor suspected of murder, carried the author's message faithfully to the end, but when he then had to close to the proceedings with the trite remark that "Life was odd," most excusably he lost interest.

A frugal and fragile rectangular set with the joins showing proved a drag on the imagination.

H.G.M.



(Right):

### "Detective Story"

Latest American success to reach this country, Sidney Kingsley's strong play about the seamier side of life as seen at a Detective Squad Room in New York, is presented at the Princes by Jack Buchanan. Douglass Montgomery (right foreground) is the star, and others in the picture are L. to R., Chris Kane, Ronan O'Casey, Neville Crabbe and Archie Duncan.

(Picture by Maurice Ambler)

### "The Lady Purrs"

THIS new play, by Ted Willis, shows what a lot of fun we lose every time we blindly follow Euclid and withdraw our attention from a proven absurdity. Suppose, says Mr. Willis, that the shock of a thunderstorm could transform a domestic cat into human form. Add the power of speech and I won't make any more demands on you. We make these two concessions and are richly rewarded by Mr. Willis's wit and invention. Henry Kendall has produced so that none of the humour is lost and the company could not be bettered.

Tranquil, slim, sleek and slinky, Eleanor Summerfield luxuriates in feline philosophy and animal repose, rousing from time to time to make a shatteringly apt remark. Cats in stories belong to Aldermen and as the Alderman in this story Charles Heslop swells and bombinates, only to shrink and squirm every time he suddenly realises the new pitfalls that the sudden change in the natural order has set in his path. As his plain speaking, plain looking Mother, Gwen Nelson represented half the women in half the buses in the South of England plus the power of voice production. Christopher Steele, as the local vicar, ran a sad sweet smile which changed as he appeared to bite on a rotten tooth. The character of the domestic in the Salvation Army might have been taken from *The Corn is Green*, but Dandy Nichols made it appear quite fresh. The job of showing Transport House modelling itself on the Foreign Office was performed neatly by Neil Crawford. Viola Lyell added to the fun as a Vicar-stalking spinster, and the difficult task of saving a little dignity for the Alderman's wife was achieved by Gwynne Whitby.

This is a show one would wish a long run and regular revival. H.G.M.

### "Latin Quarter 1950"

ON the whole this new version of the London Casino's luxury musical is more of a feast for the eye than the ear. Visually one is stunned by so much opulence, so much glitter, but the hearty laugh is rarely heard, and the witty line is rarer still. Vic Oliver struggles manfully with a poor script and brings his musical genius to bear on an interlude which most glaringly takes Tchaikowsky's name in vain. Still fresh in the memory, however, is the item from Les



Compagnons de la Chanson, the French troupe of male singers who are certainly benison to the ear with their delightful part songs and wonderful *joie de vivre*. The sequence based on a flashback to 1920 has its amusing moments and Sylvie St. Clair, the little French singer, has a way with her in songs like "C'est si bon" and "Tire d'Ailles." F.S.

### "Murderer's Child"

EDWARD Rutherford's new play is a tense study of a woman's anxiety concerning the development of her only son whose father was hanged for killing two women in revolting fashion. When we first see Penelope Ellis, it is 1931 and she has just returned from a trip abroad. She is living apart from her husband and she longs for a child. As the result of a temporary attachment formed during her holiday, she finds that her dearest wish is to be realised and she returns to her house on the Berkshire Downs full of hope and enthusiasm. Then she picks up an evening paper and recognises the photograph of the man held by the police.

The action of the play really begins when Mrs. Ellis's son, Stephen, is eighteen. With more of duty and dread than affection, she has watched over him with tireless care and, as a result, the boy is so frustrated and bewildered that nervous clashes between them are frequent. While Stephen is at home for part of his summer vacation, Mrs. Ellis beseeches a domestic agency to send her some help. They repond with Lilian, a rather mysterious young woman, blonde, bland and provocative. Stephen was by way of being Antonine but Lilian overcame that and an





(Left):

### "El Destino"

Pirmin Trecu, Kathleen Gorham and Sheila O'Reilly in Angelo Andes' successful new ballet to music by Manuel Lazareno, with decor by Hugh Stevenson, which has proved an attractive addition to the Sadler's Wells Theatre Company's repertoire. Latest new work for this Company has been Michael Somes' much-praised *Summer Interlude* first produced on 28th March.

(Picture by Denis de Marney)

assignment in a wood was arranged between them on her half-day. Stephen drew a plan of the place, hurriedly and shakily, so that they should not miss each other. When Lilian was found there in the evening, murdered, Mrs. Ellis felt that the long-awaited doom had fallen.

Ray Jackson capably expressed Stephen's pent-up emotion and painful nervous strain. Though his mother seemed to grow if anything younger with the worry and the passing years, Ruth Dunning kept us well in the situation and made us believe in it. As the pale, seductive siren, Marcella Salzer was complete.

Richard Lake's set establishes a social standard that the opening dialogue does much to destroy, and the latter seems to be at fault.

H.G.M.

### "The Provoked Wife"

LEIGH Hunt considered that Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife* maintained the promise of *The Relapse*, which had appeared a few months earlier, but this will hardly be admitted today. It is nevertheless, a hearty, rollicking comedy that may always be sure of a welcome.

Humour abounds in characterisation and situation, but *The Provoked Wife* does not contain a part so eminent and original in folly as Lord Foppington nor one so arresting as Miss Hoyden. Sir John Brute, said to be Garrick's favourite part, is the principal character. He is too soft for what his name implies to-day, being but a cad with a

world of waggishness to redeem him in the eyes of an audience. On these lines, Russell Waters gives a good account of him. His drunken soliloquy on the subject of Constant's challenge, which can go creditably in the list of humorous speeches headed by Falstaff's on honour, lost nothing in the delivery. Wit and epigram one expects and takes for granted from all the characters. It seems as if in those days if a man had not this turn he did not write at all. The play under notice should be regarded rather as the pastime of an architect than the main work of a writer. In Max Adrian's production, only Adele Dixon, an adorable Lady Brute, and Miles Eason, a handsome Heartfree, give the proper stylisation that the rather rowdy plot requires. They are well seconded by Noël Dyson's control of the exaggerated affectations of Lady Fanciful. It is a happy moment when she and her maid (Julia Flaxman) flutter across the stage shrilly twittering like starlings.

The conclusion, implausibly contrived and fundamentally unsatisfactory, leaves Lady Brute tied to Sir John but with a prospect of cuckolding him with Constant, which possibility was all that the play started with.

The one pure ray of high idealism is sadly dimmed by the brief passage between Constant and Heartfree, culminating in "To be capable of loving one is better than to possess a thousand," being sentimentalised in a manner that would seem raw in a musical

H.G.M.

### "Detective Story"

THERE is certain to be a fascination for the English spectator in this—presumably authentic—glimpse of a few hours in a New York police station. Most of us have no first hand knowledge of the ways of London police stations and their inmates but we don't imagine anything like this, nor are we inclined to see reflected our own more stolid detectives in the effervescent lads of Sidney Kingsley's Detective Squad Room.

Nevertheless, Mr. Kingsley's picture does excite and the kaleidoscopic happenings of this hot August evening give scope for wealth of characterisation. We have shrewdly drawn picture of a number of the



types, some past hope, others just stepping on the slippery slope to crime and prison, who are thrust—none too gently—into the Squad Room prior to appearing in Court, and interlaced among it all is the story of the last hours of Detective McLeod. In a way his is the most unconvincing character of all, for this hard man with his anti-crime complex is patently a pathological case who wouldn't have held his job for five minutes. Douglass Montgomery to his credit brings conviction to the role, which he plays with every emotional stop full out. In his pursuit of a bogus doctor who had made a fortune from abortions, McLeod uncovers his own much loved wife's unhappy past, and because of his unbending nature their happiness is shattered for ever. Helen Backlin portrays the wife with rare sensitivity, and many others in the long cast give memorable performances. F.S.

### "East Lynne"

EXPERIENCE has shown that 19th century melodrama fills the Bedford Theatre, whilst new plays do not. In consequence a heady and hearty season has opened with Mrs. Henry Wood's never-to-be-forgotten *East Lynne*. This is of the same vintage as *Lady Audley's Secret*, but it has to be uncorked with rather more care. With two death-beds to present, the range of appropriate period ballads is limited. However, we listen with Mr. Carlyle as first Lady Isabel and, years later, Barbara Hare devotedly sing to him "When Other Lips," with striking dramatic effect, since the ears that are attached to the other lips in question are also listening in each case. One had a suspicion that some who came to scoff remained to pray. *East Lynne* is funny only incidentally. The story is no funnier than *Othello*, and Rosemary Scott's performance as Lady Isabel was calculated to draw on the hidden wells of compassion in most people. After all, to civilised people death is never funny. Certainly an actress as Little Willie looks ludicrous, but a real child would be unbearable even if the Law would allow one to appear. With this heavy handicap, his scene is moving and the play it prompts in the imagination is much more so. People who do not like to be bidden to think upon death concentrate upon the spectacle of a full-grown young woman dressed as a boy of

seven and extract what amusement they can. Later, when we saw Miss Jill Mason beaming from behind a bolster in mid air and holding a green harp, we were past amusement, merely stupefied.

It is particularly gratifying to a student of English drama to be able to witness a play of this kind and date in a fairly straightforward production on a high acting level. Milton Rosmer, Bill Shine, Bruno Barnabe and Pat Nye all brought out the full flavour of these old style types very cleverly. The drama was produced under the direction of Mr. Gordon Crier.

H.G.M.

### "Fire-weed"

NICHOLAS BELA'S play seems to have been written with moral purpose. It puts before our eyes the wild children of disturbed Europe so that we painfully realise the next to hopeless labour of those whose mission it is to tame them. These children are realists in a simple, hard, rock-bottom world. We dare not leave them so. According to Mr. Bela, however, attempts to fit them into Western European conventional life are regarded by them as all wild things regard attempts to cage them.

Working on this mistrust is the Hitler Youth element, lying low and biding its time,



JOAN HOPKINS

who is appearing at the Playhouse as Leonora in the successful revival (produced too late for review this month) of Mordaunt Shairp's *Green Bay Tree*, in which Hugh Williams is taking the role of Mr. Dulcimer, formerly played by the late Frank Vosper.

(Portrait by Ronnie Pilgrim)

AMONG plays produced too late for a review in this issue are the following: *The Gentle People*, Embassy (13th April); *Orange Orchard*, New Lindsey (12th April); *Trilby*, Bedford (17th April); *Ivanov*, Arts (20th April); *Cry Liberty*, Vaudeville (21st April) and *Sauce Piquante*, Cambridge (27th April). Criticisms of *The Holly and the Ivy* at the Lyric, Hammersmith, and *The Man With The Umbrella* (Duchess), are also unavoidably held over.

but ever plying a potent secret weapon in the sharp incisive gibe it can always make at the goody-goodness, the tameness of toeing a line drawn by non-German authority.

Interest in the play mounts as this situation is understood. The fight between Anton Bruckner, the wild youth, and Vlashek, the secret Nazi, provides an exciting climax to the drama. On the social side, we leave the reconditioning Americans doggedly toiling in Hope's despite.

The fine courage and steadfastness of Anton and his obstinate mistrust of all save the few children in his gang are completely realised by Patrick Doonan, and the girl, Jarmila, who is passionately devoted to him, is vividly portrayed by Mary Morris. Jarmila's mother, Mrs. Petry, a woman of the cultivated middle-class, perhaps the farthest remove there is from pure savagery, is confronted after years of separation with a wild girl from the mountains. Blood calls and memory. That is all they have in common. But Mrs. Petry never wavers, never loses courage or patience. Gladys Boot imbues the woman with an admirable spirit.

From a theatrical point of view, a particularly telling part is that of the young Nazi, Vlashek. Of course, an ounce of wickedness is worth a ton of piety on the stage or in a story. Vlashek has more than

an ounce, but Harold Lang does not have many opportunities to see how far it will go. He wastes none and it is wonderful what an effect he creates. His is a penetrating performance that disturbs by its efficiency. Chloe Gibson's direction carries the author's message over on waves of excitement.

H.G.M.

## UNITY THEATRE

### "How I Wonder"

NOTHING if not topical, Unity Theatre, presents the first production in England of Donald Ogden Stewart's play which was produced on Broadway last year with Raymond Massey playing the principal part.

Americans are much more atom-conscious than we seem to be and this play reflects that consciousness. The scene is Professor Lem Stevenson's retreat on the roof of his house and the decor by Bernard Sarron is realistic yet pleasant to gaze upon. Professor Stevenson, a distinguished astronomer on the staff of a large American university, is so disturbed in his mind that the tricky expedient of using three players to represent him is made use of, this time with success. His problem is no new one. It is whether to accept the principalship of a university and become a pillar of the existing social

(Continued on page 32)

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*Charles: You're not thinking of me as the elderly man to do the light work and Venetia to do the cooking, are you?*

A scene from Act 1 showing (*l. to r.*): Janet Burnell as Venetia, Lady Crayne, Ronald Squire as Charles, Lord Crayne, Cecily Byrne as Anne (the Bishop's wife), Kenneth More as John, Michael Gough (on ladder) as Gerard, and Margaret Gordon as Helen. Lord Crayne is not amused by his nephew's offer of jobs on his farm.

## *"The Way Things Go"*

FREDERICK Lonsdale's new comedy at the Phoenix Theatre has settled down to a deserved success thanks to the author's wit and the splendid acting of the company headed by Ronald Squire, Michael Gough and Glynis Johns. Miss Johns, indeed, gives one of the most attractive comedy perfor-

mances seen in London for many a year, and her return to the West End stage is thereby doubly welcome.

The play is presented by Stephen Mitchell. Anthony Pélessier directs, and the decor by Michael Weight is an attractive ingredient of a most pleasant piece of entertainment.

PICTURES BY ANGUS McBEAN



*Charles:* The first mo  
I have will be spent  
having you put in  
good mental home!

The Duke of Bristol's estate is being sold up, but a family conclave can find no solution to the crisis apart from Gerard, one of the Duke's brothers who has acquired the adjoining family and is willing to give his reluctant family jobs.

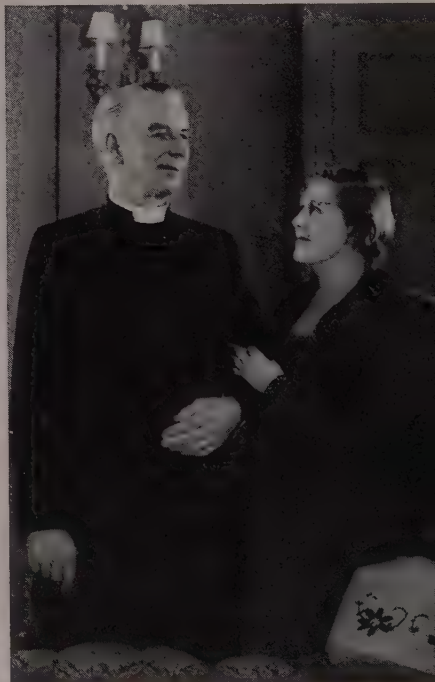
(L. to R.): Dan Stoll as Ernest, other brother of Duke, and Pet MacDonell as Duke of Bristol.



*Mary:* I would insist on motoring from Scotland to Southampton—and our boat train leaves early in the morning—will you please hire us a car that will get us there tonight?

(Glynis Johns as Mary.)

The arrival of Mary Flemin, who, with her father, an American millionaire, has been stranded near the Duke's home.



*Anne:* Home, William! Helen is doing all the washing up.

Tristan Rawson as the Bishop of Westons and Cecily Byrne as Anne, his wife, who is also Lord Crayne's sister. They have been taking part in the discussions about the family fortunes.



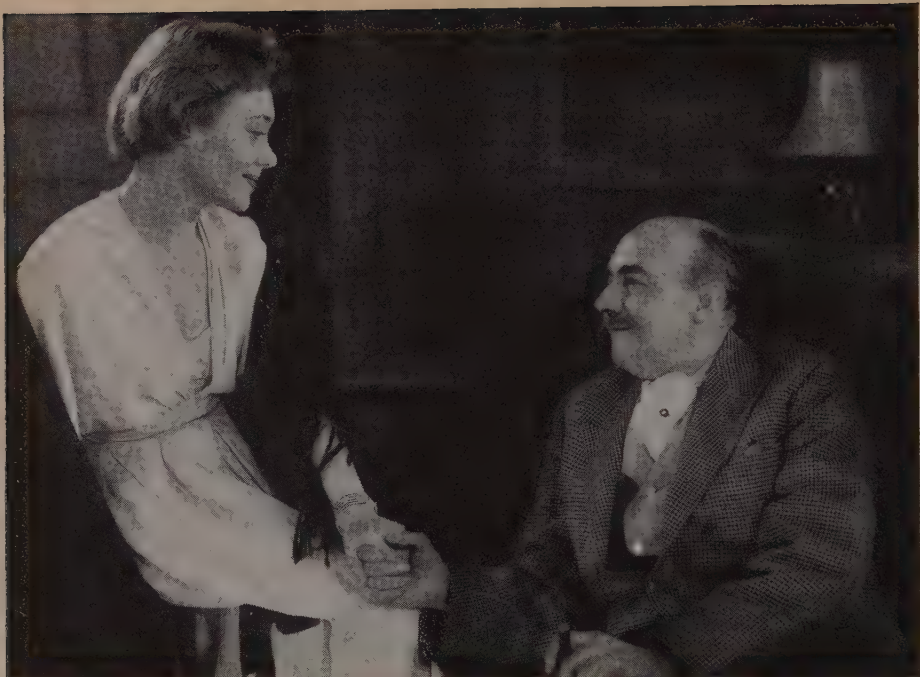
Dr. Shaw: Don't worry, my  
success as a doctor is tact.

Soon after her arrival  
Mary is taken ill with a  
temperature and a local  
doctor is called in. Al-  
ready Mary is attracted  
by Gerard and during  
her illness which follows,  
and which delays all  
prospects of the Flemings'  
return to America for  
four weeks, it is Gerard  
whom she insists on  
having in attendance.  
(Right): Arthur Hewlett  
as Dr. Shaw and Robert  
Adair as Robert Flemin,  
Mary's father, who is a  
washing machine manu-  
facturer in the States.



George: Our guest losing again? Robert: A little. But I won yesterday. George: I wish I had been here to see it.

The unscrupulous Charles has found a way of relieving his guest of some dollars, much to the Duke of Bristol's disgust. A game of cards has become a regular pastime during Mr. Flemin's stay. John, the family toper (centre), is another brother of the Duke.



*Mary:* Fly to Paris with me—a lovely dinner—and dance all night?

*Charles:* Sorry, I don't fly. I see no point in dying four thousand times and then ignominiously finding yourself alive on an airfield.

Mary, recovered from her illness, has been making an all-out attack on Gerard with whom she is violently in love. But Gerard has been studiously avoiding her, being determined not to marry a wife without money. Meantime Lord Crayn is all sympathy.



*Mary:* I'm not interested. I only want to bring a child into the world—and I want you to be the father of it. Now, would *that* suggest to you that you are not wanted?

Mary does not mince her words but Gerard is adamant.

(On the left Helen, Gerard's sister-in-law, in workaday clothes, the only member of the family to lend a hand on the farm.)



*Charles:* You didn't write that book?

*Robert:* My dear Charles, *I* write a book on bridge—you who have seen me play?

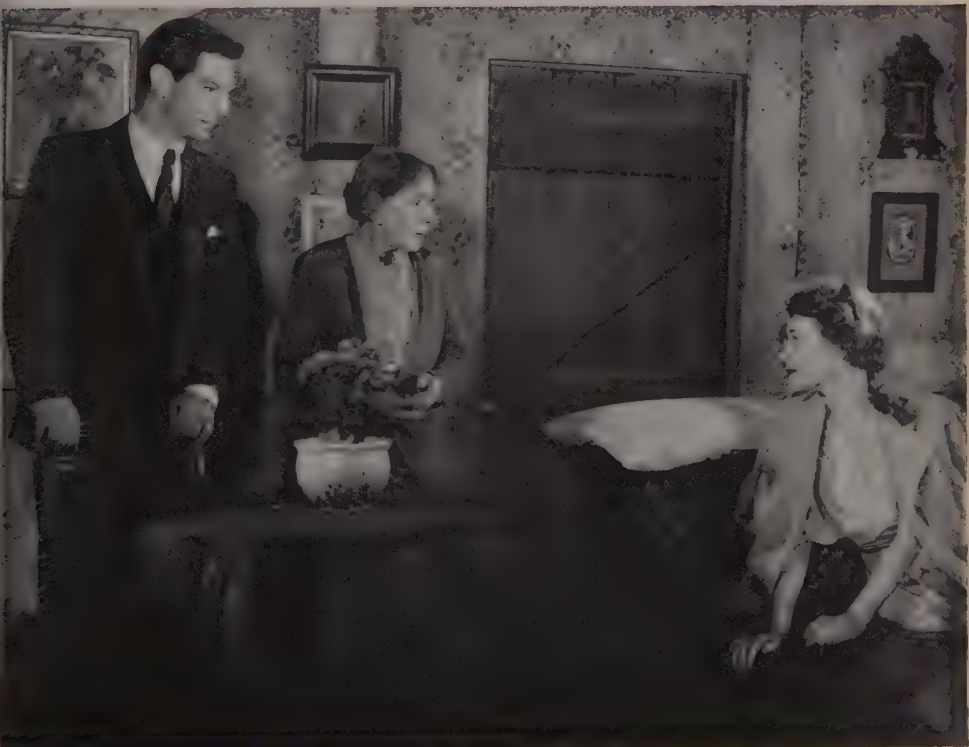
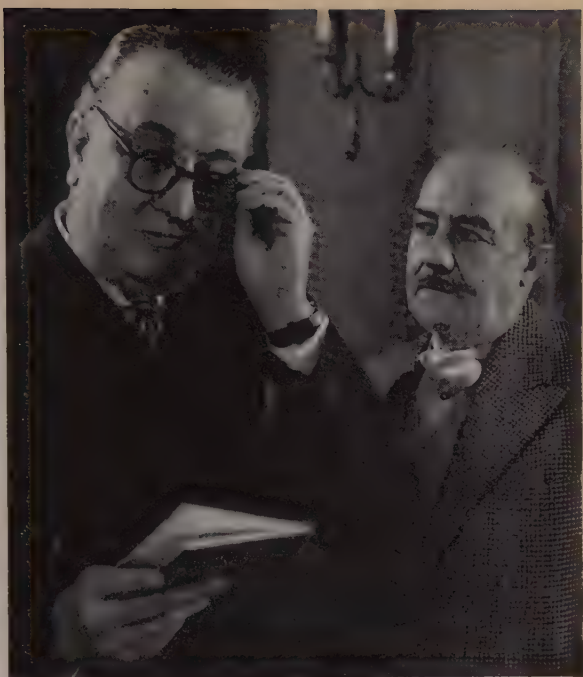
Mr. Flemin gallantly denies authorship of an expert's book on bridge. Patently he has allowed himself to be fleeced by the wily Lord Crayne as one means of repaying the Duke's hospitality.

*(Below):*

*Old Lady:* You were married this afternoon? But how wonderful! Why didn't you let me know? I would have made you a cake.

Fate plays into Mary's hands when she and Gerard are stranded in a fog on their way to the airfield. Taking refuge in a cottage for the night she quickly outmanœuvres him by telling their hostess that they are newly married.

*(Centre: Frances Waring.)*





*Gerard:* You're the most amusing, the most attractive, the most divine woman I will ever know.

Gerard is no match for Mary; who has taken the precaution of hiding the key of their room in the cottage, and as the night wears on he falls a victim to her seductive charm.



Back at the Duke's home the next morning Gerard has agreed to marry Mary and the family naturally is very delighted. However Gerard insists that Mary should join him on the farm, but her logical mind will not counterbalance the folly of living in discomfort when she has a fortune at her back. Another deadlock ensues.





*Mary:* What are you going to do?

*Gerard:* Take you triumphantly to my family—offering them further proof that I am a man of strength—it would be fatal to let them know I am not.

A compromise is reached in time for a happy ending. Gerard feels that he has exerted his authority and demonstrated that he has the upper hand, while, of course, Mary knows full well that she has won the day.

**The closing moments of the play.**

# The Stars of "The Way Things Go"

*Right:*

**GLYNIS JOHNS**

who has made the biggest hit of her career on this her first West End stage appearance since 1946.

*Below:*

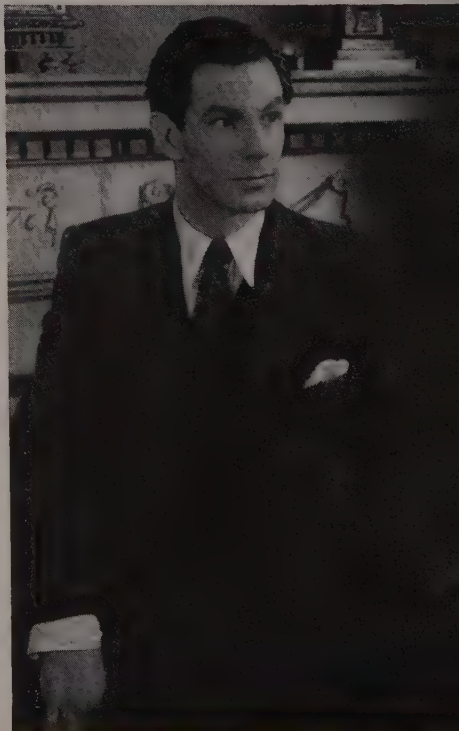
**RONALD SQUIRE**

who gives another of his famous brilliant character studies as Lord Crayne

*Below right:*

**MICHAEL GOUGH**

who is fast becoming one of our leading younger actors. He was recently seen with Gertrude Lawrence in *September Tide*.







A scene from the film *The Queen of Spades*, adapted by Rodney Ackland and Arthur Boys from the Pushkin story. This magnificent film set is by Oliver Messel, and Anton Walbrook is seen as Herman beside the catafalque on which lies the deceased Countess (Edith Evans). (Picture by Edward Mandinian)

## CREATIVE ARTISTS IN THE THEATRE

by ELISABETHE H. C. CORATHIEL

### 4. Oliver Messel

SOMETHING very exciting and remarkable is happening in the English theatre at the present time. Deep-rooted prejudices against propositions which used to be regarded as completely uncommercial are being speculatively revised. Cautious managements which at one time would not have touched poetic drama with the proverbial barge-pole are now launching innovations that make considerable demands on the imagination—and are finding no particular reason to regret their choice. Poetic drama is “in the money.”

Outstanding successes in the West End for the last year or so have included plays of a class which could by no means be described as “popular” in the previously accepted

sense of the word. They might, indeed, be rated “high brow.” Box office response to these bold ventures seems to indicate that the public are so tired of the prosaic humdrum life outside that they are turning with relief to experiment in the theatre, ready and eager to be lifted out of reality into an enchanting world of make-belief.

Noticeable, too, is the fact that in every case, these highly stimulating, adventurous productions do not rely upon the spoken word alone, pregnant as this often is. On the contrary, the splendour or the ingenuity of the setting makes the first impact upon the mind of the spectator. It is this that establishes the mood of the whole work, and

often remains as a lasting memory of delight when the actual words are long forgotten.

In the very forefront of this new movement in design stands Oliver Messel.

One has only to recall a few examples of his more recent achievements—outstandingly, the whole decorative arrangements at Covent Garden for the Gala in honour of the French President and Madam Auriol, the settings for *Ring Round the Moon*, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, and several magnificent ballets; the film *The Queen of Spades* and many other memorable productions to realise the enormous influence he is having on contemporary taste.

"Ballet seems to be setting the pace in audience-reaction to decor," maintains Oliver Messel. "Ballet audiences are so eye-trained that the emphasis on visual effects in every branch of entertainment must necessarily be accentuated to meet current expectation."

So the process has gone full-circle, and ballet, which went hand-in-hand with the Masque to launch theatrical art as a secular delight (as distinct from the Mystery Play, which was a religious institution) is once again helping to break new ground and revolutionise stage-craft.

In past centuries, the theatre as a pioneer-force in cultural matters was the shop-window of a sovereign's pomp. Only Princes and Kings could permit themselves the luxury of mounting these extravagant and costly entertainments, with which they aimed to dazzle the chosen circle which was permitted to witness them. The splendour of these spectacles betokened the ruler's authority, it gave visible expression to the grandeur of Majesty.

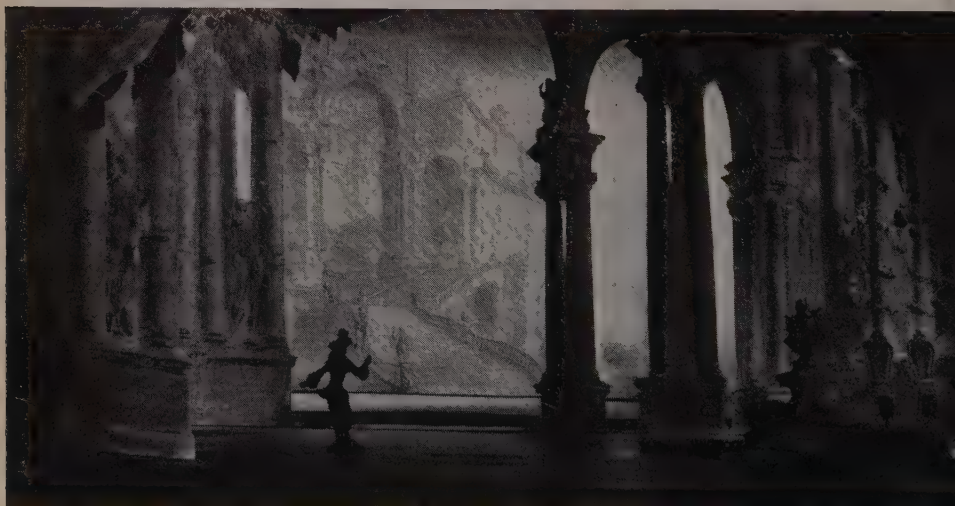
The brilliance of the settings and the ingenuity of the effects produced by secret machines had an element of surprise and shock that jerked the spectator into alertness, fixed his attention, and transported him to a world mid-way between real and unreal, consciousness and unconsciousness, in which he felt himself raised to kinship with the gods and heroes appearing on the stage. With the aid of his own imagination, his attitude of naive, uncritical acceptance, he was able to overlook faults and take the supernatural for granted with a child-like readiness. The players were no longer men and women; they were beings from another world, and the spectator, in their company, made a brief, blissful excursion into the dream-filled Nirvana of escapism.

Something very similar is happening to-day, except that the initial urge which calls the superb artistry of modern stage production into being is the sovereign will of the people themselves.

When ballet was still in its infancy, great artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Andrea del Sarto and Brunelleschi were not above devising and constructing intricate machinery for the great transformation scenes with which they tricked out their stage productions.

The modern artist follows in their wake—but as he can now call to his assistance all the resources of electricity, he can achieve miracles to which the great masters of the past would never have aspired, merely by the manipulation of switches. This may lessen his responsibilities as an engineer, but it renders even more important his feeling for colour, line and perspective.

(Continued on page 30)



The picture above shows a 1/4-inch scale model of the final scene of the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* as produced at Covent Garden by the Sadler's Wells Company. Oliver Messel's decor for the ballet has been widely acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic.

(Picture by Edward Mandinian)



WYNDHAM'S  
THEATRE

(Right):

RALPH  
RICHARDSON  
as  
David Preston

PICTURES BY  
HOUSTON-ROGERS



“*Home at Seven*”

THIS new mystery play by R. C. Sherriff is another splendid example of his skill in presenting the English middle class background. His hero, David Preston, leads a normal well-ordered existence as a City bank clerk until the night on which the play opens and he discovers that he has completely lost the previous twenty-four hours of his life, that is, since he left his office on the night before, and that during that time the steward of his local Social Club, whom he detested, has been mysteriously murdered on the nearby common.

The author brings to the unravelling of this mystery a real human touch, but he is more than fortunate in having Sir Ralph as David Preston, for it is essential that the audience should believe in this man and no actor is more skilled in conveying absolute sincerity and integrity. The other members of the cast give excellent performances and the play is directed most skilfully by Murray MacDonald. The decor by Tanya Moiseiwitsch gives a good impression of a London suburban home.



*Mrs. Preston:* There was that one in Elm Tree Road, David.

Mrs. Preston (Marian Spencer), worried about her husband's lapse of memory, has called in Dr. Sparling (Cyril Raymond), who is trying to probe for a reason for David Preston's amnesia. They discuss a bomb incident in the war.



*Major Watson:* Have roped him in as a member.

The ebullient Major Watson (Philip Stainton), President of the local Social Club, of which David Preston is Treasurer, calls just as the doctor is leaving, and Mr. Preston learns to his horror that the Club funds have been stolen from the safe.



*Mr. Preston:* Don't do anything tonight.

Major Watson wants to notify the police of the theft. It has been reported that Mr. Preston was seen on the premises the night before, and haunted by the thought he has committed some crime during his lapse of memory, David wants time to think. Later the body of the steward is found—murdered—on the nearby common.

*Inspector Hemingway:* If you will just give me the name of the people you stayed with on Monday night.

The next morning the Inspector of Police (Campbell Singer) calls. By now Mr. Preston is in a terrible nervous state, and in an effort to cover himself has said he spent the Monday night of his lapsed memory with friends in another part of London, only to discover when he phones that they have been away from home some days.

*Dr. Sparling:* Pure auto-suggestion!

The doctor believes that his patient could not, even when suffering from loss of memory, have been guilty of theft and murder, but David Preston begins to doubt himself, and tries in vain to recall some of the things that happened to him on the fatal night.





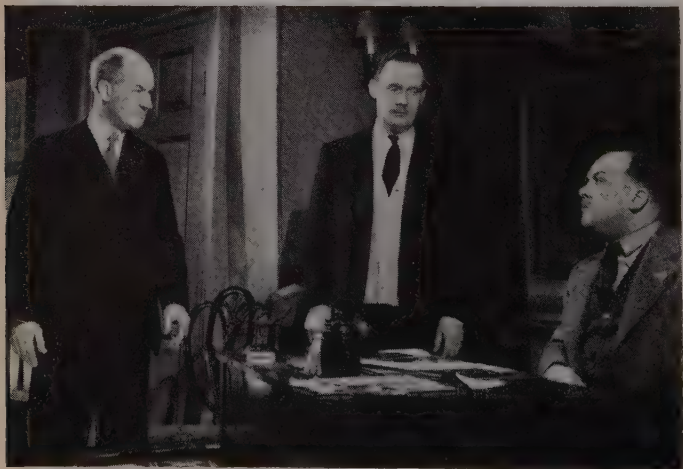
*Mrs. Preston:* No, Doctor, I want you to stay.

Things begin to look s  
black for her husband  
that Mrs. Preston calls i  
Mr. Petherbridge, a sol  
citor (Frederick Piper  
to act in his interest.



*Major Watson:* When I said  
was going to the police, I  
nearly went on his knees  
stop me.

Major Watson airs h  
suspicions of David  
Preston to the doctor  
who neatly turns th  
tables by demonstratin  
how difficult it would b  
for Major Watson him  
self to furnish a cast-ir  
alibi for the night of th  
murder.



Mr. Petherbridge takes  
hand in subduing t  
troublesome Major. Pol  
enquiries are still goi  
on, and as yet Davi  
mind remains a compl  
blank about his l  
twenty-four hours.





*Mr. Preston: What are you doing here, Peggy?*

A scene towards the end of the third act, when Peggy Dobson (Meriel Forbes), the barmaid of a little pub in the City frequented by Mr. Preston (unknown to his wife), calls to see if she can help clear up the mystery. It would be unfair to divulge how David Preston's innocence is established, but all ends happily with a full explanation of the missing twenty-four hours, and in the picture below David's loyal wife realises with joy that there is now no need to post the letter of resignation to her husband's chief at the Bank.





**"Mr. Gillie"  
at the  
Garrick**

● A scene from James Bridie's new comedy, produced by Alastair Sim who also stars in this unusual play about a Scottish village schoolmaster. *L. to R.:* Gordon McLeod as Dr. Watson, Alastair Sim as Mr. Gillie, Janet Brown as Nelly, the doctor's daughter, George Cole as Tom Donnelly, Nelly's husband and a miner's son turned "spiv," and Meg Jenkins as Mrs. Gillie.

(Picture by Houston-Rogers)



● One of the many bright scenes in the new Crazy Gang show at the Victoria Palace, in which Bud Flanagan with Nervo and Knox and Naughton and Gold are the Gang in many hilarious items. (*Above*): Bud Flanagan sings "Hey, Neighbour" with other members of the company.

(Picture by Houston-Rogers)

**"Knights of Madness"  
at the  
Victoria Palace**



BY OUR  
AMERICAN  
CORRESPONDENT  
**E.  
MAWBY  
GREEN**

Marie Powers and Patricia Neway in a scene from Gian-Carlo Menotti's powerful new musical drama, *The Consul*, reviewed below.  
(Picture by Talbot-Giles)



## Echoes from Broadway

THE waning New York theatrical season, and far from memorable one in the playwrights' contributions to it, received a much needed jolt with Gian-Carlo Menotti's new musical drama, *The Consul*, presented by Chandler Cowles and Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. The critics at last were in accord, their notices being ecstatic; a new star was discovered in the person of Patricia Neway, who stopped the show on opening night and has been doing it every night since; and audiences knew once again the theatrical thrill of walking stunned from the theatre with emotions mangled.

It all started when Mr. Menotti read a newspaper clipping telling of the death by suicide of a woman refused a visa, and from this scrap of information of such terrible hopelessness in this world of ours, he recreated an overwhelming tragedy of a brave, tenacious young woman, painfully stripped of all she holds dear—child, mother and husband—defeated by her inability to cut through in time the endless bureaucratic red tape of a police state.

The story outline is boldly simple and melodramatic. Magda Sorel's husband, John, a member of the Resistance movement, is wounded and spotted by the police in a skirmish, and has to flee the city with his compatriots; head for the border; and hope to find a way to cross it. His wife goes to the consulate to get the necessary visa to enable her eventually to join him. The endless forms and papers to fill out and daily waiting at the consulate are appalling, and during this period of patience without progress, her baby and later her mother dies. Finally, after an impassioned plea to the Consul's secretary, she breaks through this creature's callous disinterestedness in the plight of the people around her, and gets her to arrange an interview with the Consul, only to see the Chief of Police, the man who has trailed and tormented her, emerge from the Consul's office first and she crumples to the floor. Several days later Magda is back again waiting, when she receives word that her husband, desperately worried about her, is planning to come back to the city, and if

he is caught, as he most surely will be, all his friends' lives are in jeopardy. Magda writes the only letter she knows that will keep him away, but it is too late. John returns to the consulate looking for her and is seized by the police, while she, unaware of these events, returns home and resorts to turning on the gas. This framework, so obvious, in other hands might be suspect of being a theatrical fraud designed solely to incite, but Mr. Menotti's passion and honesty burn so brightly and steadily that *The Consul* achieves the stature of true tragedy.

The story is not embellished with plot twists, but by the variety in the author's music and his flair for the unusual scene. A world famous magician, Nika Magadoff, for example, is also a daily visitor to the consulate on a visa search. One day, to impress the secretary with his pre-war importance, he hypnotizes the unhappy company; tells them they are in a grand ballroom and dancing with their beloved. Each rises and dances alone to the sweet music. The effect is bizarre and pathetic, and, of course, theatrically exciting. And from the bizarre to the macabre is just a step for Mr. Menotti. In his final scene, he gives the young woman breathing in the gas and suspended between life and death, visions of her past life. Choreographed to a waltz, she sees her husband in happier days; her mother, young and radiant, not the defeated old lady at her death; and the magician's hypnotized dancers. She finds it difficult to make contact with any of them. The visions fade; her head falls back over her chair; the telephone rings but she is past answering it. Macabre but also deeply affecting.

As Magda Sorel, Patricia Neway is just about perfect and is enjoying one of the season's major triumphs. Her voice is warm and brilliant and the intensity and polish of her performance seems to belie the fact that she has appeared only once before on Broadway—as the Narrator in Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucrece*. Due to the secondary position of her role as the mother, Marie Powers, the unforgettable fraud of Mr. Menotti's *The Medium*, comes off second best, but her lullaby to her ailing grandchild is one of the highspots of the performance. The rest of the cast, under Mr. Menotti's direction, is the equal of the

leading performers, and Broadway is still dumbfounded to see opera a smash hit in a Broadway show shop.

Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* is also a smash hit, now that Joshua Logan has transplanted it to Louisiana under the title of *The Wisteria Trees* and has Helen Hayes starring as Lucy Andree Ransdell, the southern Madame Ranevsky, but we feel a great many theatregoers will still prefer to see the original, which is not much of a commercial proposition for Broadway. It is not that we hold any academic scruples about tampering with a masterpiece, although Mr. Logan ran into much of this during the tryout period, when the play was billed as an "adaptation" of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, but rather that the play is shoddy theatre in its new form.

Now programmed as "a new American play" "based on" *The Cherry Orchard*, after an extensive re-write job on the road made mandatory after the cold audience and critical response plus the purists' complaints, *The Wisteria Trees* plays like a sentimental romance written by a popular author of women's magazine stories, and we daresay its success will be due to its slick shallowness. Women are just going to adore seeing Helen Hayes run the emotional gamut with the emphasis on love. As Lucy Andree Ransdell, she may be shiftless, irresponsible and *déclassé*, but she can't help it—really, she can't—for she's just a woman, a weak little woman, whose heart must rule her head. Men fall in love with her. She doesn't know why. She doesn't tempt them. They just do. And this includes her daughter's boy friend and Yancy Loper, the poor white trash who buys the estate but will spare the wisteria trees if Lucy will become Mrs. Loper. He will even bring the estate back to its former glory and everybody in Louisiana will have to beat a path to their door. But you know our heroine. She's not strong enough for such responsibility. Besides, she doesn't love Yancy. Her heart is in Paris, with her good-for-nothing lover who spends all her money on other women and drink. But back she goes to him, as the curtain falls, while Yancy supervises the chopping down of those memorable trees (If you are wondering what happened to the

(Continued on page 30)

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# Whispers from the Wings

By  
LOOKER ON

FEW actresses at the age of 19 are as firmly established on Shaftesbury Avenue as Claire Bloom, whose fragile beauty is so exquisitely suited to the role of Isabelle, the young ballet dancer in Christopher Fry's enchanting translation of Jean Anouilh's *Ring Round The Moon* at the Globe Theatre.

At her age, most young women are only just beginning to think about going on the stage, but Miss Bloom made a genuinely early start. Before she reached her teens she knew she wanted to become an actress, and put her talents to the test as a child during the two war years she spent in America. At the age of eleven she took part in two or three broadcasts of children's plays, when it became evident that her gift for characterisation was outstanding.



CLAIRE BLOOM

as she appears in *Ring Round the Moon*, the brilliant success at the Globe Theatre.

(Portrait by Houston-Rogers)

On her return to England, a year later, she won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and also worked under Eileen Thorndike. By way of finishing off her studies she went to the Central School of Speech Training, and while there, on her fifteenth birthday, created something of a stir on the air by playing Ann of Oxford Street opposite Esme Percy in a radio

adaptation of De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*.

By that time she felt she was ready to tread the boards, so she joined the Oxford Repertory Company, where her two outstanding performances were both characters named Jessie—Jessie Strachan, the girl with the Ophelia complex in *Pink String and Sealing Wax*, and Pte. Jessie Killigrew of the A.T.S. in *It Depends What You Mean*. Returning to London, she caught the eye of Robert Helpmann and Michael Benthall who engaged her to understudy and walk-on at the Duchess in their superb production of *The White Devil*, when, incidentally, Heather Stannard seized her first chance by playing for Margaret Rawlings during the latter's indisposition. Miss Bloom stayed on for the next production at the Duchess, playing a small part in that unforgettably lovely production of *He Who Gets Slapped*.

When Michael Benthall went to Stratford-upon-Avon to produce *Hamlet* in Victorian dress, he singled out Claire Bloom as the ideal Ophelia for the alternating Hamlets of Robert Helpmann and Paul Scofield. Anthony Quayle played Claudius to the Gertrude of Diana Wynyard. Miss Bloom also played Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* and Lady Blanche in *King John*. She gained a taste for Shakespeare at Stratford and will never be content until she has played as many of his heroines as she can manage to crowd into her stage life.

After appearing in *The Damask Cheek* at the Lyric, Hammersmith, this young actress came to the Globe in Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning*, and she has stayed on at the same theatre to play Isabelle in *Ring Round The Moon*. She was fascinated by the role, partly because she enjoys playing period parts, but mainly because Isabelle is a dancer, and Miss Bloom adores going to the ballet. When she is not playing herself, she is to be found there at least three nights a week.

Like the rest of the cast, she is more than gratified by the enormous popular success of *Ring Round The Moon*. After all, the house full boards are not to be wondered at when one realises that, like *The Heiress*, this "charade with music" is a Cinderella story. Quite apart from being a wholly fascinating play, it has more than a touch of fantasy, delicious comedy, a breath-takingly beautiful winter-garden setting, colourful costumes and Addinsell music with a delicate appeal of its own.

Messel's perspectives are breath-taking in their grandeur. He has a great partiality for avoiding the middle-distance, favouring curved colonades, and reproducing his avenues, arches, passages and eventual exits ad infinitum usually a little to the right of the centre, which permits the introduction of more arresting and original effects. He knows when to substitute suggestion for definite statement, relying upon stage lighting to pick out points he wishes to emphasise, and throw mysterious shadows over details meant to hint at more than they actually show. Every minute experiment is worked out first on paper, not just on a single sheet, but cut-out-layer superimposed on layer, border on border. Finally an exact scale model is made, reducing the stage-picture to tri-dimensional terms.

For the opera based on Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*, in which Lord Harewood is taking a special interest, the designs, which I was privileged to see, are a real education. As the action proceeds, the mind of Herman, the officer in the Engineers (through which we follow the story) becomes more and more deranged. The decor faithfully mirrors this growing mental confusion, culminating in a perspective which opens on to a storm-swept sky, the dominant note of which is that rather mystical blue-green which Messel so often favours. His use of curves, always arresting, is here represented by the scarlet table, left-front, as dramatic in colour as in design. The whole set is an almost unembellished "canvas" into which the drama will melt as the characters appear and the lights come into play.

James Laver wrote in the preface to one of Messel's books: "Just as the Theatre began with the Mask, so did the Art of Oliver Messel." That is strictly true. Oliver Messel got his first chance in stage designing—which was not at all the kind of work he had thought of adopting as a career—when C. B. Cochran happened to see some masks which he had made for his own amusement. Cochran promptly gave an order for a set of masks for his next production. That was in 1926. Noel Coward saw them, and, instantly inspired, wrote the popular song: "Dance, Dance, Dance, Little Lady." That number set the seal to Messel's work; he was now fairly launched, and success followed success.

I asked the artist whether his service with the Engineers during the war had in any way advanced his stage technique. "Yes, it did," replied Mr. Messel without hesitation. "It taught me that one of the secrets of success is to be able to tell other people exactly what you want them to do. This is often a task calling for infinite patience, and Army life helped me to develop patience. It also helps a great deal if you know how to do the thing yourself, that you are asking other people to do. Many young artists slip up in stage

designing because they have a notion that if they put an attractive drawing on paper, they have nothing more to do. There is a great deal more to it than that! Personally, I gained invaluable experience at the Slade school helping to get up the annual 'stunts' for the Chelsea Arts Ball, for which we had to make all the details ourselves, using whatever materials came cheaply to hand. This just goes to prove that constructive work, no matter how frivolous at the time its purpose may appear, is never really wasted."

## **Echoes from Broadway** (Contd.)

ancient family servant, he was sent to a hospital at the beginning of Act Three.)

The critical reception to *The Wisteria Trees* was mixed and rather kind. Miss Hayes, however, was almost unanimously lauded, the *New York Times* calling it "the richest performance of her career." As one who was never caught up for a moment with the play, Miss Hayes necessarily had to leave us cold, so we had a good chance to study her technique, and was amazed to see how similar in style she is to another famous American actress, Ruth Gordon. This might be due to the fact that Mr. Logan writes the same kind of scenes and dialogue that Miss Gordon, who is also a playwright, does. It comes right off the top; it is extremely actable for the moment; and is completely forgotten the next.

Mr. Logan directed his own play without much subtlety. His Negro servants, for example, are straight out of musical comedy, and if Miss Hayes, somewhere in the proceedings slouched against a lamp-post and sang "My Man," it would not have been out of place.

The second musical entrant of the month *Great To Be Alive!*, produced by Vinton Freedley in association with Anderson Lawler and Russell Markert, is designed purely to entertain in the good old-fashioned way. It has handsome settings; lavish costumes; attractive girls; fine choreography; a hard working cast headed by Vivienne Segal, Stuart Erwin and Valerie Bettis; reminiscent songs by Abraham Ellstein, and so-so lyrics by Walter Bullock. Probably enough to get by with, if the book were a bit more inspired. One part murder mystery; one part sex farce; one part *Blithe Spirit*, and one part *Berkeley Square*; it's shaken together all right, but it tastes like one part gin; one part wood alcohol; one part crème de menthe, and one part blackberry wine.

The New York Drama Critics have made their awards for the 1949-50 season, the best American play being *The Member of the Wedding* by Carson MacCullers; the best foreign play, *The Cocktail Party* by T. S. Eliot, and the best musical, *The Consul*, by Gian-Carlo Menotti. No surprises. No upsets.



# Blood & Thunder

by ERIC JOHNS

● Right: A scene from *East Lynne*, first production under the new policy at the Bedford Theatre, which is now to be the London home of Victorian melodrama. In the picture are Milton Rosmer and Rosemary Scott.

## PICTURES

BY

G. SCOTT BUSHE



UNTIL recently the London theatre could always be relied upon to offer almost every form of entertainment—except the classic melodrama. Now the gap has been courageously filled by those two young actor-managers, Pat Nye and John Penrose, who have decided to make the old Bedford Theatre in Camden Town the permanent home of Victorian melodrama. Their step makes this former London music hall a unique playhouse—the only theatre in the world devoted to the production of melodrama. Playgoers who regard these blood and thunder pieces with real affection have shown their gratitude to Miss Nye and Mr. Penrose by packing the Bedford Theatre night after night, since the recent revival of *East Lynne*.

“It is no good staging such plays in an unsuitable house,” emphasised Miss Nye. “We felt that melodrama matched our theatre in Camden Town, so we inaugurated our management with *Lady Audley’s Secret*, which we turned into something of a frolic by the introduction of songs and dances. The reception exceeded our wildest hopes and encouraged us to revive Dion Boucicault’s old Irish play, *The Shaughraun*. This second success led to our giving the public what they obviously wanted, *East Lynne*, and a succession of the richest melodramas that held the breath of Regency and Victorian playgoers.

“There was no suggestion of our burlesquing works such as *The Shaughraun* and *East Lynne*, which are good plays in any case.

Our respect for these lurid masterpieces obviously met with the approval of discerning galleryites who promptly ‘shushed’ the stallites when they laughed in what the ‘gods’ considered the wrong places.

“Above all, these melodramas must be acted with a burning sincerity, if they are to become stimulating entertainment in the eyes of a modern audience. They demand a larger-than-life technique and on that account they appeal even to those youngsters who have been entertained almost exclusively by the cinema. The rising generation, who found the underplaying of modern comedies, usually confined to one set, rather dreary, are fast developing a taste for the flamboyant presentation of melodramas, often boasting as many as seventeen different scenes.

“Playing to Bedford audiences is something of a tonic for artists weary of facing lethargic after-dinner playgoers. Our Camden Town patrons are decidedly alive, tingling in every nerve with a sense of expectation and reacting to every scene with unabashed enthusiasm. They threw pennies on the stage when we sang our songs in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, but even so they do not express themselves as violently as did their grandfathers in the same theatre. In those good old days when an uproar broke out in the gallery a net used to be dropped from the roof caging in the ‘gods’ and thereby protecting the actors from such missiles as beer bottles and paper bags filled with pease pudding.

“Playing melodrama is a tiring business for



(Left):

Bruno Barnabé as the villain and Pat Nye as Miss Carlyle in another scene from *East Lynne*.

the actor. He has to play with all his heart and soul and sweep through the evening with terrific gusto if he hopes to make a worth while impression and project his rôle in the grand manner. Generally speaking, audiences are sympathetic and moved to respectful silence in such poignant scenes as the death of Little Willie in *East Lynne*, but there may be nights when they become over-demonstrative or speak out of turn. On such occasions the actor must never get rattled or he will instantly lose control and the play will be wrecked in the ensuing mêlée. Never must the Smart Alicks in the house be allowed to assume the rôle of the comics, or they will take charge of the show and the evening will end in disaster. The actor must never surrender to the audience whom he is paid to entertain.

"Nothing is easy for the leading players in a melodrama. There is no build-up to their entrance, as in a well constructed modern play, which plunges the audience into a state of longing for the heroine to make her entrance. In most of the old dramas she makes an early appearance, with little or no previous fanfare. It is left to the actress to make as vivid an impression as she can in the shortest space of time before getting on with the unfolding of the plot.

"The producer has a tricky job in keeping his cast in hand, never permitting a breath of burlesque unless the situation happens to be one which the audience would never take seriously. He must realise that the old dramatists were not as stodgy as many modern playgoers imagine. There is a delicate humour about their dialogue which must not escape the artists. The shabby sets in which so many of these pieces were

originally acted would not be tolerated to-day. The plays must be attractively dressed and staged, and performed with a certain polish against occasional fragments of suitable melody. Our musical director at the Bedford, Arthur Collier, has written original music for each of our productions, coloured in each case by the period and the situation on the stage.

"Melodrama was originally welcomed as a form of escapism by those Victorian and Regency playgoers who preferred to witness the tragedy of George Barnwell, rather than see the problems of their own time enacted upon the stage. It is the same to-day. People come to the Bedford for a glimpse of those more leisurely days when the lord of the manor never dreamed of having to escort visitors round his castle for half-a-crown a time. It is rather a joy, on the occasions when I am not playing, to slip into the auditorium and watch the ladies trying to conceal the embarrassment of their tears by the deft use of a handkerchief. It makes me so happy to think that the theatre can still move playgoers to tears, even in the age of the atom bomb."

### New Shows (Contd.)

and political structure or to sacrifice even the job he already holds by what might be called ill-timed social criticism and subversive agitation. He throws away the former alternative and fluffs the latter, but in the last Act achieves both by reason of fame accruing from his discovery of a planet new to astronomy. By the time his photographs are developed the planet has become a star, its inhabitants having destroyed its life by misuse of atomic energy.

The perplexed professor is presented in three sections, the ordinary man as other see him, his mind and his conception of the ideal. The last appears in the guise of an attractive young woman whom he calls Lisa and it is Lisa who tells him the fate of his planet. Richard Hayter gives the professor a tense earnestness, a somewhat abstract manner and a scholastic stoop. He has a very nimble mind in Bruce Taylor and his poetic aspiration fades in lyrically in the appearance of Dorothy Brewster. The interplay of these three is very well co-ordinated and matter for admiration. The professor's wife, flustered, distressed and pathetically loyal is played by Mary Ogg. The production by James Daplyn is brisk and sure of its effect. Unity have ever been distinguished for their spirited attack and once more this feature demands particular praise.

H.G.M.

(Continued on page facing)



## "Spring Fever" AT THE TORCH

THE best thing about this new Oxford musical revue, was the book by Anthony Chalmers. The performance was high spirited but crude and nobody had a voice of much power. Elizabeth Rogers sang two songs sweetly in manner well adapted to this small theatre. There was a very pleasant spirit about it all and no dreary waiting about. The stage management earned full marks for slick continuity. Inexperience and lack of training on the part of performers did not blur the bright invention of the writing, which was full of ideas, witty, pointed and topical. Most enjoyable comedy playing came from Arnold Reuben and Sally Seed. Music by Leopold Antelme supplied pleasantly rippling support. H.G.M.

## "No Flies on Pegasus" (WATERGATE)

THE title Beresford Egan has given to his drama written in light comedy idiom is likely to act as a warning to the playgoer. The play is about an artist of Gauguinesque character and originality who lives in Cornwall in a cottage filled with pseudo-artists and hangers-on who all give him a bad name but cannot muster the moral energy to go away. Whether detained by the spell of the master or by the weight of their own inertia, their brittle dialogue, spoken by the company as if they had met for a party and were trying to be bright to fill up the time of waiting, reached us as broken crockery. Since the author himself produced, it was strange that such qualities as it had were not more respected. "The quickness of your tongue is all my eye," one of the characters remarks with an aptness not possibly foreseen. As

for the painter of genius, it is not difficult to appear to be of superior fibre to the flimsy material surrounding him, but John Longden succeeded in making him acceptable as a genuine human being. Otherwise the evening had nothing to commend it.

The stage is still very attractive, but it now has a front curtain. H.G.M.

## BRISTOL OLD VIC

### "Captain Carvallo"

DENIS Cannan is indeed a happy cynic. His new play caused much merriment at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, when it was given its first performance on 14th March. *Captain Carvallo* is a bedroom farce on conventional lines; the bedroom is out of sight (which is dramatically and censorially *comme il faut*) though rarely out of mind (which is evidence of a well sustained theme). A rifle that fires when it should not, dynamite that will not explode when it should, a cupboard for two to hide in, and a husband finding his wife in another man's arms—all this has been seen before and is here seen again, but these dry bones of farce are so invested with a "magical garment" of epigram and wit that they take on a new life and scintillating vitality. With a quip and a laugh the author takes pot-shots at the deeper experiences of human society—Peace and War, Religion and Science, Love and Chastity, and his aim is so sure and his target so large that he might perhaps have kept some of the shots in his locker for other occasions—or the third act.

We are not expected to believe in this farm household in Occupied Ruritania where friends and mortal enemies intermingle on

(Continued on next page)



Dorothy Tutin and Frances Rowe in a scene from the Bristol Old Vic's production of *Captain Carvallo*, reviewed on this page. This new play by the author of *Max*, which attracted much attention at the Edinburgh Festival last year, has been bought by Sir Laurence Olivier for London production. (Picture by Desmond Tripp, Bristol)

# Flora Robson joins the Theatre Book Club



FLORA ROBSON

as she appears in *Black Chiffon*, one of the biggest successes of her career. *Black Chiffon* finishes its run at the Westminster on 6th May, after which there will be a provincial tour prior to American production.

**A**MONG an increasing number of actors and actresses who are becoming members of the Theatre Book Club is Flora Robson, one of our greatest dramatic actresses, who has for many months now been delighting London audiences with her superb performance in *Black Chiffon*.

Miss Robson writes that the books chosen for the Theatre Book Club "*will make interesting additions to one's library, and not only for the actor but for all theatre lovers all over the country.*" She goes on to say that she already has two of the books in the list, and has read the others, but would like to join the Club so that she can make presents of those she has already.

See page 4 for full particulars.

## BRISTOL OLD VIC (Contd.)

the most amicable terms. Nor are we doing justice to so able a playwright if we probe for a didactic purpose. We must be, and we are, well content to enjoy the fun while it lasts and to share with him a piquant relish for racy dialogue and the apt phrase. When in the third act this barrage of witticisms gives place, in more serious mood, to the realism of enemy gunfire, the play breaks its back on the new idiom and the corpse is hurried from the stage with scant ceremony.

The Professor Winke of David King-Wood is a piece of rare virtuosity, and, following his finely romantic Orlando, displays a range and competence which is of immeasurable value to any repertory company. This partisan Professor of Tadpoles, dry and agnostic, is that stock character of farce who is caught up in outrageous circumstances—in this case domestic, belligerent and sartorial.

Emrys Jones as Carvallo is a gay Captain (though with a soul to save and a taste for poetry) and able to conquer foe or damsel with equal ease.

As Gross—a batman with no inhibitions—John Moffatt gives another of his well drawn character studies.

The skilful direction of Allan Davis ensures smoothness and zest to this interesting production of a play which is sharing the season's honours with works of the immortals.

W.H.S.

## "Shadow and Substance"

AT THE QUESTORS, EALING

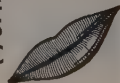
**T**HE revival of Paul Vincent Carroll's play, which won the Casement Award of Irish Academy of Letters and the New York Critics' Foreign Award, provided, in Eric Voce's skilful production, a stimulating experience. An impressive and beautiful performance was given by Joyce Hornett as Brigid, the young domestic who believes herself to be under the direct influence of St. Brigit. The bright and solemn reverence expressed in Miss Hornett's eyes and voice and entire bearing was exactly what the part required.

The play exists on three planes, the comic, the natural and the spiritual. The comic scenes were always successful, Bill Beesley being outstanding for his artistic portrayal of the entirely ridiculous Francis. Roy Ambrose and Gregory Coker were com-



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## "Shadow and Substance"

A scene from the Questors' most praiseworthy production of Paul Vincent Carroll's well-known play. Eric Batson is seen as O'Flingsley, Joyce Hornett as Brigid and John Howard as Canon Skeritt.

(Picture by Ronald Stilling, Ealing)



pletely convincing as Father Corr and Father Kirwan on the natural plane. So was Eric Batson as the forward-looking and impetuous young schoolmaster O'Flingsley.

One character is expected to appear properly in place on all three planes, the Very Rev. Thomas Canon Skeritt, the voice of God in Ardmahone, a demand which John Howard seemed not always fully to meet. The contradictions in this character are so striking that an actor needs something that the author has not provided to induce an audience to accept them as belonging to the same man. He is religious yet ever resorting to sarcasm, ritualistic yet cynical to the verge of blasphemy, fastidious yet unable to pass an hour without the use of a vulgar colloquialism. Perhaps over-conscious of all this, John Howard gave a thoughtful, deliberate performance which brought these inconsistencies much to notice. H.G.M.

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## R.A.D.A. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE

**F**OR over three hours in the afternoon of 28th March some four score students provided excellent entertainment at his Majesty's and made the future of the English theatre seem rather bright.

Hugh Miller's production of Scene 1 from *The Dark Hours* by Don Marquis, neglected since about 1926, contained so much to admire that one longed to see the play revived. The crowd work was particularly well managed. The words of Jesus were spoken off with solemn beauty by James Grout, who was awarded Lord Lurgan's Prize for Diction. The mental agony of Judas was dramatically revealed by Peter Fawcett, awarded The Bancroft Gold Medal. This was the outstanding performance of the afternoon.

The last flicker of the 19th century seemed as attractive as it was artificial in Mary Phillip's production of a scene from *The Liars* by Henry Arthur Jones, which was notable for its fine period style.

A scene from John Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* was introduced by a passage of fine verse very well spoken. A Judge's Medal was awarded to Alvin Hurwitz for his performance as Lincoln, a very difficult part for a young actor, and the Bronze Medal went to Ted Baden for his sensitive character study of Mr. Douglas, the negro preacher.

Life in an American Girls' School, as shown by N. Richard Nash in *The Young and Fair*, was astounding in its revelation of a Headmistress's readiness to sacrifice principle for expediency and then back up the betrayal with an emotional appeal. For her performance as the Headmistress, Eve Pearce was awarded the Gertrude Lawrence Prize for Character acting and the Academy Silver Medal went to Frances Hyland for her venomous senior girl.

The Irene Vanbrugh Prize for the best acting in French was given to Robert Welles, who gave an admirably smooth performance in a garden playlet by Marivaux. H.G.M.



## Amateur Stage

**F**OLLOWING the first successful event of its kind at Harrogate last year, the British Drama League is holding its second amateur theatre week at Bournemouth from 26th May to 3rd June next. The annual conference will be part of the week's activities, which centre on the Palace Court Theatre by invitation of the Bournemouth Little Theatre Club.

The whole week is devoted to a very varied and interesting programme, which includes productions of six plays by various visiting companies, lectures and informal discussions on stage subjects, coach tours including a visit to Longleat, where a first folio of Shakespeare will be on view.

This idea of a week of mixed theatre activity and interest for amateurs in a holiday period of the year is an attractive and instructive development of B.D.L. policy, and it is certain to be well attended. For this reason, readers of this column desiring to attend should make immediate application to the League at 9 Fitzroy Square, W.1.

Running for ten nights each, the summer season at the Mountview Theatre Club, 104 Crouch Hill, N.8, has an attractive list of

plays. Opening dates: 10th May, *Arms and the Man* (Shaw); 31st May, *The Eagle Has Two Heads* (Cocteau); 21st June, *Inspector Calls* (Priestley); 12th July *Viceroy Sarah* (Ginsbury).

The London and South East Region of the National Operatic and Dramatic Association hold their annual week-end conference at Hastings on 5/7th May, with headquarters at the Adelphi Hotel, Warrior Square, St Leonards. The annual general meeting is timed for 2.30 on the Saturday afternoon. A dinner and dance takes place at the Queen's Hotel on the Friday night.

To the growing list of amateur little theatres in the provinces must be added the Hall Green Little Theatre, Birmingham, now in the building stage under the picks and shovels of its members. The licence granted included the condition that no outside labour is to be paid for. And the group had another sort of incentive in that no development charges are payable. So on a vacant site a theatre 27 ft. 6 in. high, 97 ft. long and 50 ft. wide, to seat 200, will be erected. The first two sections, auditorium and one wing, will involve £1,500 for materials, and should be ready by spring of 1951, when it is planned to give productions on a temporary stage. Secretary is Keith A. Pickering, 93 Reservoir Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham 29, who will welcome additional labour.

Three new plays were among the fifteen given at the Wimbledon Drama Festival in mid-April at the Town Hall, organised by Wimbledon Community Association. John Bourne was the adjudicator.

Play competitions in spirit with next year's Festival of Britain are sprouting. With closing date of 31st July next, *The Amateur Stage* is sponsoring a competition of full length plays. First prize £10 and publication.

New Park Repertory Theatre Club, S.W.2, acquired a cellar in 1949, which they converted into a little theatre, with a small stage, dressing room, which is also the prompt corner and houses the switchboard, a minute auditorium seating from 26-30 people, and a small lounge. The stage was constructed chiefly out of champagne crates. The switchboard and lighting of the entire theatre was the work of an engineer member of the Group. Sets for the plays are executed by a school boy of 14. The proscenium curtain and a tapestry hanging in the auditorium are the work of Harald Melvill, whose sets for *The Kingmaker* at the St. James's Theatre received much praise. The Group aims to be entirely self-supporting, all the costumes for the period plays being cut and made by members. The theatre opened in October 1949 with a play about the last four years of Queen Elizabeth's life, called *From a Fair Lady*, written by the Assistant Keeper of the London Museum, Mr. Martin Holmes.

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